

CHRONICLE AND COMMENT OF THE STAGE

Blind in the Dramatic Eye

The Broadway Stage and Its Relation to Such Drama as "The Torch"

By Ralph Block

THE materials of art are always the same; it is only attitudes that change. What is new in the theatre of the last half hundred years is merely what is new in the attitudes of society toward itself. Ibsen, Shaw, Galsworthy, Barker, Bahr—these are merely so many markings on the new skin of the social conscience. Even that elementary process of play building which the dilettante delights in calling technique draws its progressions from the same source. A mechanical civilization destroys the elegancies of life, the prettiness of its conventions, the sheer laces of imagination with which men try to hide the sharpness and quondam ugliness of living. Rationalism in science extends to rationalism in art, and in the theatre appears—as it so certainly has done in France, that most rational of countries—an impatience with the conventions of romance. For Paris the result was the Théâtre Antoine. For Germany the result was Sudermann or Wedekind; for Russia all the "realists" whose wave has not yet been spent; and for the theatre almost everywhere a greater concentration on the unadorned materials of living, an attempt to see life as it nakedly is.

THE Broadway stage is the most unique stage in the world, because in the midst of a social life that can only exist so vastly and prodigiously because it can bring to its aid the forces of mechanical science, because in the midst of a life that would seem to insist for its own safety on a scrutiny of the facts of life as it is maintained here, the Broadway stage can still maintain an almost utter oblivion to everything except the old fables, the old romanticisms, ideas, new attitudes, penetrate into this medieval atmosphere so rarely and with so sudden disaster when they undertake the daring business that an entire strange philosophy of the theatre has grown up in the darkness. Startlingly strange philosophy of an audience known as the Tired Business Man, and following it with the entirely justifiable economic theory of giving the public what it wants, this philosophy now calls to its aid psychology and points out that the theatre is the playground of an oppressed civilization, that, instead of seeking thought in the play, civilization in America goes to the play to seek relief from thought. Entertainment by this measure becomes an attempt on the part of the playwright or the dramatist to rearrange the materials of living in such bewildering combinations and so differently from what may be expected outside the four walls of the theatre that audiences may find a satisfaction there that they could never hope to experience as they live. The commonest ends of the American drama therefore become the fulfillment of "suppressed desires"—the desire to win wealth and to get it easily; the desire to win social position, fine clothes; the desire of the many million persons of country antecedents to win distinction, with all its emoluments, in the cities. Just why Americans should so carefully insist on running away from the facts of life, persisting in Cinderella plays and Pollyanna plays and all the other debris of a worn-out fancy, when the rest of the civilized world in its theatre demands as nearly as possible a transcription of reality, can only be explained by the fact that we are imaginatively overdeveloped and oversensitive, that we are still too far from being grown up to be able to face with intellectual curiosity what is cold and hard and unbending in our life without inner comfort; that instead of hunting for wisdom like adults, we are children who hunt in our art for pretty fictions to make us forget. "Business Before Pleasure" allows us to forget, or "A Tailor-Made Man," or "Eyes of Youth."

MR. WILLIAM ARCHER says somewhere in his admirable but somewhat badly named book, "Play-Making," that the French are given to over-emphasis on the intellectual side of their themes. What is really true of the French dramatists is that they are moralists, which is very difficult for an American to believe, because the Frenchman deals carefully and assiduously with a side of life that most serious American writers—in the past at least—are equally careful to avoid. The Frenchman writes entirely from the standpoint of curiosity—with the exception of such playwrights as Bernheim, who is not really representative. The Frenchman is curious about life itself, and his plays are full of his curiosity. He probes and pries among the facts of life, delicately but none the less persistently. It is a commonplace thing to speak of the Frenchman's conception of a powerful motivation in the life he sees, a motivation that has its place in the United States, but is passed over in silence by the unquiescent American playwright. He recognizes sex—or at least so do his managers—by filling force and musical comedy full of it. He is apparently ashamed, except in a few plays like "The Easiest Way," to treat it with any seriousness or any dignity.

"THE TORCHES," which had an auspicious beginning at the Bijou Theatre Wednesday night, is the old material of the French theatre transformed by a modern attitude. Reduced to its elements, "The Torch" which changed Henri Bataille in the eyes of the Parisian public from a somewhat shoddy playwright into one of serious claims, tells the story of a man who, tired of his mistress, palmed her off on his friend, returned to her for a brief moment after her marriage, was caught, and had to fight a duel which was fatal to him. But examination discloses that "The Torch" assumed an entirely different form under the displacement of modern ideas. The conventional approach to such a story in an earlier time would have branded the chief figure of the play as a villain, and the story would have taken the form of a romantic and syrupy drama centering about the young woman of the piece. Steal the emphasis of "The Torch" from Professor Bouquet and pin it upon the person of Edwige, his one-time mistress, and the play would recede into the vague shadows of Dumas fils. But a part of the modern discovery of human nature as distinguishable from the simplicity of fictional character is that a villain is usually a brave man. Therefore "The Torch" becomes the story of Professor Bouquet, a villain categorically, but actually a man of heroic mind and will.

To be heroic requires a conflict, something to fight against. "Drama is a representation of the will of man in conflict," said Brunetiere, "with the mysterious powers or natural forces which limit and belittle us; it is one of us thrown living upon the stage, there to struggle against fatality, against social law, against one of his fellow mortals, against himself, if need be; against the ambitions, the interests, the prejudices, the folly, the malevolence of those who surround him." And it is just these natural forces that the Professor is pitted against, not armed merely with the weapon of an elementary morality, but three armed with a morality which finds its justification in the pursuit of knowledge, of the ideas, and which aims to exclude by the cold hand of thought all interference of passion or human interest. It is a foregone conclusion, once the trend of the story makes itself apparent, that this protagonist of modernism is meant for failure. The experience of every playgoer is instinctively against the imposition of any theories upon life, because passion and desire are so much more persistent and vital than theories.

And yet with so much foreknowledge the development of the story, its progress to the point of failure, the complacency of the Professor when he receives the Nobel prize and his obvious feeling that he has foiled his past in giving his mistress to his friend, creates a finer tension than any play now on Broadway. Even the crash, when it comes, is expected, but it remains interesting. The Professor's friend blows out the torches of reason, leaves them all in the darkness of human passion, and then magnificently tears up the Professor's great work and hurls his unfaithful wife into the house. So far the Professor has had little to do. The real drama is the final act, when, wounded in the duel that was sure to follow, he debates with a poet just where the fidelities of mankind should lie. He has cast off the old morality for a new one in which his allegiance is to the purities of reason. As he looks back, doubtful in the moment, he sees that all that has happened has only justified him. His own passion was the beginning, the passion of the girl the next step and the passion of his friend the final one—all of them away from reason and a rational attitude toward life. It serves him to a final act of devotion to his philosophy. He sends away the girl, calls in his friend and his own wife, pledges them to carry on his scientific work after his death, and then dies. It is very quietly and powerfully acted here by Mr. Lonergan and his associates, but the force does not entirely lie in its acting. The idea of sacrifice is potentially the most powerful idea in all the arts, because it is imbedded so deeply in the history of human progress. The last act demands admiration for the colorless conception of a theory by two such human facts as death and death as a sacrifice to an ideal. If it remains on Broadway, as it ought, its tenure will be due without doubt to the craftiness with which the new attitude has been fitted to the old materials. The materials are always the same—it is only the attitude that changes.

"The Torch"

The English version of Henri Bataille's drama, "The Torch," which is being produced at the Bijou Theatre by the Messrs. Shubert, with Lester Lonergan in the leading rôle, is the work of Charlton Andrews, who is well known as a linguist, educator and writer. Mr. Andrews was born in Indiana and was educated in Harvard, after which he lived for many years in Paris. He returned to America several years ago to become dramatic critic for one of the leading American newspapers. Later in life Mr. Andrews taught English and French in several Western

colleges and was recently instructor in French in the University of New York, before which he was instructor in French in Brooklyn Polytechnic. He has written a number of plays, one of which, "His Majesty the Fool," was produced a few years ago in Philadelphia at the Little Theatre. Another play, "The Interrupted Revels," was produced in the Hotel Plaza by the MacDowell Club in 1913. Besides the present production of his version of "The Torch," Mr. Andrews is working on two other dramas, which will probably be ready for production during the 1918 season.



Tyrone Power, the Arabian Bandit Chief, disguised as Chu Chin Chow

Eccentricities of Genius

The life of Jacinto Benavente, author of a one-act comedy the Washington Square Players will present this week, says Fernandez-Flores, a Spanish journalist, would seem to be an exemplification of the theory that genius is in all things exceptional.

"At what time of day do you write, Don Jacinto?" the dramatist was asked. "At night, I sleep until 1 or 2 in the afternoon; then I step out to the café and join my friends. I remain with them until the middle of the afternoon, after which I make a call or take a walk. I never work in the afternoon; it is altogether impossible, as I have a constant succession of engagements and callers. After dinner, perhaps, I wander into the green room of the Princess, if the Guerrero-Mendoza company or Margarita Xirgu are playing there; or otherwise I may drop in at the Lara. When I come out I usually rejoin my tertulia at the café, and return home at about 2 in the morning. That is when I sit down to write."

"What is your favorite café?" "The Gato Negro was my favorite. However, at present I prefer the Malson Doré, which is my choice for the afternoon; I go to the Levante in the evening. A number of friends meet together there—they are all friends, indeed, before they are artists—Viu, Lico and Serrano, composers, besides Lopez Marin and Sinesio Delgado, who represent literature and drama. Whenever Sinesio Delgado is present we discuss politics, because politics are his obsession."

These last words of the celebrated dramatist fell upon unresponsive ears. The terrible blow sustained by the Gato Negro appalled the imagination. A large proportion of the clientele of that establishment consisted of strangers from out of town who frequented that café for the express purpose of seeing the master. They ordered coffee and requested the waiter to point out Don Jacinto. If Don Jacinto was not on view the customers complained: "This is an imposition. We were told that we would be sure to see Don Jacinto. Now we have drunk coffee and shall not be able to sleep all night, but we have not seen the great Benavente. If we must take another cup of coffee, why don't they say so? But, in any case, let them produce Don Jacinto!"

"Do you have much trouble with beginners who come to you and insist upon reading their plays?"

"They do not read them. I never permit anything to be read to me; I understand much more easily when I read myself. You can readily imagine how constant opportunities of this nature have come to be. I have read a great many plays in manuscript, but very few of any merit."

"You must have assisted many playwrights by your influence and advice." "Those whom I have assisted would have succeeded sooner or later without my aid, because their work was good. Many designing persons continually send manuscripts to me, offering a half or the whole of the proceeds in the event that the plays are performed through my efforts. Such profers of generosity are numerous beyond belief. The authors think to suborn me. One day I received a letter from Se-

ville. The writer was a government employe who was wholly unknown to me. I do not even recall his name. He informed me that his financial condition was far from satisfactory. 'Business is bad,' he explained, 'and times are hard. I have many demands upon my income and a large family to provide for. It occurred to me that you must have lying about somewhere, in some cupboard or other, some old play which is not perhaps quite up to your standard. It is of no use to you, but it would prove my salvation. Give me that play; I will have it acted as my own and be free from embarrassment.'"

We both laughed.

"But what did you do?"

"I told him that if I had any play which was not good enough to pass muster under my own name it would be far less likely to impose upon the public under his."

"Peter Ibbetson"

"Peter Ibbetson," John N. Raphael's dramatization of George du Maurier's novel, will move to the Forty-eighth Street Theatre to-morrow evening, after seventeen weeks at the Republic Theatre, for a stay of two more weeks in town before going on tour.



William Faversham, who will appear in "The Old Country"

New Plays This Week

MONDAY—At the Republic, "On with the Dance," by Michael Morton. At the Fulton, "Broken Threads," by Ernest Wilkes. TUESDAY—At the Thirty-ninth Street, "The Old Country," by Dion Calthrop. At the Criterion, "The Love Drive," a comedy by Sidney Rosenfeld. WEDNESDAY—At the Comedy, the Washington Square Players present four one-act plays. At the Park, "The Land of Joy."

"On With the Dance" follows the fortunes of Nina Lawrence, a dance-mad girl, married to a man who wants a home and children. This phase of contemporary American life is presented in four acts by Michael Morton, the author of "The Yellow Ticket" and other successes. The company includes John Mason, Eileen Huban, William Morris, Julia Dean, Edward Abeles, Corinne Barker, James Spottswood, Merceita Esmonde and others.

"Broken Threads," a new play by Ernest Wilkes, will begin an engagement at the Fulton Theatre on Monday night. The new play is the initial offering of Lodewick Vroom, managing director of the Pacific Theatre Corporation. The play is described as a comedy drama in a prologue and three acts and relates the story of the meeting, tragic separation and subsequent dramatic experiences of a man and woman of to-day—a tale of love, romance and adventure, in which a daring man, filled with the spirit of the West, and a winsome and attractive cabaret singer are the central figures. The scenes are all laid in California.

The play was given out of town for two weeks and possessed sufficient merit to induce Mrs. Henry B. Harris to book it for an indefinite stay at the Fulton. The two chief characters will be played by Cyril Keightley and Phoebe Hunt. Others in the company are Robert Cummings, William Roselle, Guy Hittner, Harry Redding, Paul Stanton, William Pringle and Florence Carpenter. The play was produced under the stage direction of Holbrook Blinn.

William Faversham will make his first appearance on the New York stage this season at the 39th Street Theatre on Tuesday night, when he will appear in a new English romance, "The Old Country," by Dion Calthrop, a nephew of Dion Boucicault.

"The Old Country" tells of James Lane Fountain, English by birth and American by training, who has spent his life amassing wealth so that he can return to England and buy his native village, bringing revenge on those who treated his mother unjustly at the time of his birth. The drama shows the clash between energy, wealth and determination and ironbound convention, tradition and the fragrant charm of English country life. Woven into the story is a romance between Fountain and the schoolmistress of Dormer St. Nicholas.

Supporting Mr. Faversham in "The Old Country" is an excellent company including Jane Houston, Maud Milton, Katharine Brook, Cecelia Radcliffe, Russ Whtyal, Edmund Gurney, Charles Wyngate, Edwin Cushman, Robert Pigott, Herbert Belmont, Charles Hanna, Margaret Moser and Masters Buster Hensley and Kingdon Brown. The scenes of the play are laid in Dormer St. Nicholas, a small English village. The first act takes place in the parish schoolhouse; the second act in Parmer Hall, the manor house, and the last act in a small cottage on the Parmer estate.

At the Criterion Theatre on Tuesday night Klaw & Erlanger will present a new comedy by Sydney Rosenfeld entitled "The Love Drive." On its preliminary tour it bore the title of "Under Pressure." In "The Love Drive" the author portrays a Southern gallant whose unusual magnetism and charm make him an instant favorite with the fair sex. He believes women are easily won, but he finds out his mistake in

the course of the play. "The Love Drive" is in four acts, with the scenes laid in New York and at a country seat in the suburbs. Prominent in the cast are Fred Nible, Violet Heming, Albert Gran, Hilda Spong, Eileen Wilson, Beth Franklin, Zeffie Tilbury and Arthur Lacey. The production has been staged by Edgar MacGregor.

The regular subscription season of the Washington Square Players will open at the Comedy Theatre on Wednesday night. For their first bill they will present four one-act plays. Three of them are American—"In the Zone," a play of sea life by Eugene O'Neill; "The Avenue," a comedy of New York by Fenimore Merrill, and "Blind Alley," a play by Grace Latimer Wright. The one foreign play is "His Widow's Husband," a comedy translated from the Spanish of Jacinto Benavente by John G. Underhill. There will be a number of new members in the company this season, and among the Players who remain are Helen Westley, Florence Enright, Marjorie Vonnegut, Katherine Cornell, Arthur E. Hohl, Robert Strange, Edward Balserit and James Terbell.

"The Land of Joy," at the Park Theatre on Wednesday evening, will introduce for the first time in America the music of Quinto Valverde, who has been called the Spanish waltz king. It is described as a fantastic revue in a prologue and two acts, during which twelve scenes are required to show the locales of the story. A unique feature is the manner in which an American story is blended into a Spanish locale. A cast of English speaking players interpret the story and a company of Spanish singers and dancers interpret the Spanish music and dancing.

Among the principals are Señoras Marco, Saus and Pucholl, prima donnas; Señoras Doloretas and Mazantita, premiere ballerinas; Señoras Villa and Navarro, barytones, and Señor Bilbao, a dancer. The original book of "The Land of Joy" is the work of E. Velasco and J. Elizanda. The American version and lyrics are by Ruth Boyd Ober, with interpolations by James Horan. The American principals in the cast include Nanette Flack, George Lydecker, Irving Brooks and Miss Ober.

The Wisconsin Players, under the direction of Laura Sherry, at the Neighborhood Playhouse, 468 Grand Street, announce the following programme of plays for the coming week, every night, except Monday. To-night, "The Feast of the Holy Innocents," "The Blue Gods," "Neighbors," "Rich Man, Poor Man," Tuesday, for the first time, Zena Gale's new play, "Lace Curtains," "The Feast of the Holy Innocents," "The Shadow," "Bowl, Cat and Broomstick," which will be repeated Thursday evening. Wednesday and Friday, "On the Pier," "The Blue Gods," "Neighbors" and "Rich Man, Poor Man,"

"Das Dreimäderlhaus" ("The House of the Three Girls"), with music by Franz Schubert, will remain at the Irving Place Theatre. It will be sung in German every night and Saturday afternoon.

A Villain Who Is a Hero

Whatever familiar characters Alicia Ramsey may have incorporated in "Eve's Daughter," which Grace George is now producing at the Playhouse, she has violated stage tradition in one instance. She has made a villain who is a hero.

The part of Courtenay Urquhart has all the makings of a cad. He wears a monocle, calls his innocent victim a "gell" and bribes the servants. And yet, in spite of these almost insurmountable obstacles to respectability, Lionel Atwill succeeds in making him not only attractive, but positively heroic at times.

Miss Ramsey has done her share toward the creation of this hybrid sort of villain. She has made him behave in the most unapproved sort of way, taking the "gell" away from her flat alone at night after a champagne supper, and leaving her in a Dover hotel, of all places. But whoever would condemn him for this must remember that he warned her in a most fatherly way not to take so much champagne before the soup course, and told her quite frankly that he did not believe in marriage as an institution.

He does the most villainous things in an entirely open-and-above-board manner; in his very perfidy he is the soul of honor, and many staid and estimable ladies in the audience have secretly, but none the less ardently, expressed considerable sympathy with Courtenay Urquhart and his villainous career. Which brings up the interesting question, What constitutes a villain? Leather puttees? A small black mustache? Or downright meanness? Perhaps there really is no such thing.

Hitchcock's Party

Raymond Hitchcock celebrated his eightieth birthday at the Lambs last Tuesday, or rather early Wednesday morning. Of course, he is not eighty years old yet, but, as he doesn't know where he will be when he is eighty he thought it was best to celebrate now and have it out of the way. A hundred or more members of the Lambs feasted at the party and presented Mr. Hitchcock with a token of their esteem, symbolical of his success in life.

A Model of Playmaking

By J. A. Pierce

"De Luxe Annie" is an exemplar of successful playmaking. From a short story, it was developed into a three-act play by the creation of new material which perfectly matched the original goods. The skill of the accomplishment is especially displayed in the economy of means. In spite of the complications, the intrigue is made to seem simple. The least possible effort is required of the spectator's attention. The trick reversals of the heroine's fortunes, detection and getaway, arrest and escape, running to earth and salvation, are accomplished without unwieldy mechanism or strain on the credulity, because, due to a simple basic situation, Silky Ann's enemies are in reality her friends. Yet, in spite of the technical skill of the play, it has its weak points. The interest falls off a little in the third act, and the epilogue and prologue are touched with aridity.

No sooner was the story of "De Luxe Annie" published than Scammon Lockwood, the author, began to receive letters of congratulation by the score. Some of them suggested dramatization. One of the leading motion picture companies applied for the rights. After more than a year and a half Edward Clark's dramatic version was presented on September 4 at the Booth Theatre. How many times it was remodeled during the interim, what the hammer, what the chain, in what furnace was its brain, has not been divulged. Upon its presentation the fact was patent that the play was an exceedingly neat and well oiled piece of theatrical mechanism. Once more "The Saturday Evening Post" was vindicated as the Gesta Romanorum of the modern theatre, a sort of Thousand and One American Nights Entertainments, as suitable for adaptation to the popular stage as they were lacking in any real depth of thought.

One of the first to write to Mr. Lockwood in terms of glowing commendation was Eugene L. Johnson, head of the department of English of the Northeastern State Normal School, at Tahlequah, Okla. He found the story "a scientifically accurate study in the fascinating field of psychology," and one that "might serve as a chapter in exposition of the most recent experiments and theories" of the subconscious mind. Mr. Johnson felt that the story should be developed into a novel.

Dr. George F. Barry, of Evanston, Ill., wrote that the story showed a phase of medical psychology of great importance to humanity, which was as yet little understood. He considered the story a truthful interpretation of several recorded cases. Herman Whitaker, of Denver, informed the author that the story was very similar to an actual case in his own experience, that of a woman who disappeared for seven years and, upon her return home, could not remember where she had been. Mr. Baldwin, of Peoria, inquired if the story was not based on a case in the State Hospital of Illinois.

Cases of dual personality, of course, are common, though not many of them have resembled the story of De Luxe Annie in respect to the criminal career



John Mason and Eileen Huban in "On with the Dance"

NOW ON THE BOARDS

THEATRE	PLAY	CAST
ASTOR	"The Very Idea"	COHAN
COLUMBIA	"Here Comes the Bride"	
MUSICAL		
FORTY-FOURTH STREET	"Hitchy-Koo"	
EMPIRE	"Rambler Rose"	
LONGACRE	"Leave It to Jane"	
HIPPODROME	"Cheer Up"	
SUBURBAN	"Maytime"	
NEW AMSTERDAM ROOF	"Eleven-Thirty Frele"	
PRINCESS	"Oh, Boy!"	
NEW AMSTERDAM	"Riviera Girl"	
CASINO	"Purs and Frills"	
WINTER GARDEN	"Doing Our Bit"	
MANHATTAN OPERA HOUSE	"Chu Chin Chow"	
AROUND NEW YORK		
STANDARD	"Chin Choo"	
COLUMBIA	"The Behman Show"	
MAJESTIC	"Good Gracious Annabelle"	
LOEWS SEVENTH AVENUE	"The Inner Man"	